



# Pick Your Path to Health

## Managing Stress — A Juggling Act

Women today hold so many roles that the number of balls in the air at any one time can be overwhelming. We are raising children, caring for elderly parents, holding down demanding jobs, keeping homes in order, pursuing degrees or second jobs, and volunteering at schools and places of worship. We are so many things to so many people, and too often stress takes its toll on our lives—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The dangers of unmanaged stress are significant. Studies show that 43 percent of adults suffer adverse health effects from stress, and 75 percent of all physician visits are related to stress-related complaints. Stress can bring on symptoms that mimic a heart attack, depression, or anxiety. It can also lead to serious illnesses and health problems, including high blood pressure and ulcers.

On the flip side, stress can have a positive impact on our lives. It can fuel our energy and make us more productive. It can motivate us to overcome obstacles, face our fears, and achieve our goals.

"Excessive stress can have a negative effect on women's lives," says Tanya Ozor, National Director of the Spirit of Women, a nonprofit group of hospital systems dedicated to empowering women. "But by tapping into effective coping skills, like exercise, and drawing support from healthy relationships, women can learn to handle stress and even use the energy generated by stress to their life's advantage."

How stress impacts our lives—whether it is positively or negatively—is a consequence of how we manage it. Here are some tips to keep stress under control, and make sure its effects don't weigh us down.

- Trust the abilities of your children: Caring for children is more than a full-time job. As kids grow, hand over some of your chores. By doing so, you will ease your load and teach them responsibility at the same time. Maybe they can make their own lunches. Certainly older children can help around the house and pick out their own school outfits. Encourage cooperation and self-reliance. Everybody wins!
- Decrease your anxiety at work: An estimated 1 million workers are absent on an average workday because of stress. Overseeing boring or lonely work, having little control over your schedule and

tasks, and enduring excessive demands all put a strain on workers and create dangerous stress. Talk to your supervisor about possible solutions—or think about finding a new job where the stress level is not so high. If you do speak to your boss, come prepared with innovative solutions.

- If you are caring for an elderly parent, ask for a hand! And if the assistance of other family members, friends, and neighbors isn't enough, see if outside help is available. Even for those of limited income, your Area Agency on Aging may be able to provide home health aide services, transportation, home-delivered meals, chore and home repair, and legal assistance. Give them a call.
- Get out! Spend that nervous energy in positive ways—exercise with friends, join a class, take a day to yourself. Figure out what "stress buster" is best for you, and then go to it. When you put yourself first, some of the stress will fade, and everyone will benefit from a revived you!

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*